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THE OBSEQUIES OF ORPHEUS.

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THE OBSEQUIES OF ORPHEUS

READ BEFORE THE

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BY

gr
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THE OBSEQUIES OF ORPHEUS.

The delight of the Gods was young Hellas to see
On the breast, in the arms of the Ægean Sea,
Where their fostering diligence lovingly spread
Those munificent gifts that prosperity bred,
Ere her warm heart was chilled by historical lore
Or her fancy was curbed by the myths that it bore,
When her garlanded grottoes supplied them a home
And her valleys were gardens through which they might roam,
When her fountains were clear as the light from the sun
Where their daughters might bathe with their tresses undone,
And the rills in her mountains from silver cascades
Threw a sanctity over her evergreen glades,
And each landscape reflected in river or stream
Was the dwelling of deities held in esteem
By a people as brave, as impassioned and free
As e'er conquered the land, or were masters at sea,
When her zephyrs were laden with perfume so sweet
That it scented her groves to their inmost retreat
Where the voice of their oracles, faithfully heard,
Was allotting to each the success he preferred,
When the future was known from the flight of a bird,
And the brutes by omnipotent power were stirred,
When the fairest of priestesses served at her shrines
With a virginal purity sweet as her wines
While adorning the altars with flowers and fruits
Keeping time in their hymns to melifluous lutes,
When the frame, and its creatures, were cordially bound
In a kinship that nature rejoiced they had found,
'Twas a dream before waking to eminent deeds
That were augured by Hellas's mythical creeds.

Where Pelion frowned upon a restless sea
 And Ossa smiled across the western lea,
 Where wild Peneus rolled her silver tide
 While on her breast the oily streamlets glide,
 Beside the Vale of Tempe's verdant plain
 Where Pindus chose to crown his famous chain
 Olympus reared on high his spacious head
 As if he knew and felt his Maker's tread.
 About his zone, and spreading o'er his knees,
 Were oaks, and pines, and stalwart chestnut trees
 To hide o'erhanging rocks with fissures wide
 That marked the limits where the Gods reside,
 While on his neck eternal snowdrifts rest
 As kings wear spotless ermine round their breast.
 Above these guards that human steps defy
 His head seemed floating in the clear blue sky.
 'Twas here great Zeus was wont to hold his court
 As well immortal Homer's lines report.

One morning when Aurora's crimson blush
 Bespoke the crimes of night she fain would hush,
 Ere she with rosy fingers took away
 The bars that shut the golden gates of day,
 Or brushed aside the dew pearls from her eye,
 Or stirred the welkin with her gentle sigh,
 Puissant Zeus, his sceptre in his hand,
 Assumed his throne and curtly gave command
 To Hermes that he call his trusty hosts
 To come before him from their various posts

The troubled stars shot flaming through the sky,
 The Ægean waves made helpless sailors cry,
 The gentle rivers caught the moaning moods
 Of winds that murmured through the sacred woods,
 The birds flew vaguely to the unknown west,
 The brutes ran homeless exiles seeking rest,
 Terrific tumults rolling under ground
 Gave back from heaven's concave awful sound,

Each creature conscious of some present ill,
 Some interference with Eternal Will,
 Seemed disconcerted and by fear perplexed
 With all its best affections rudely vexed.

Apollo, first, the radiant god of day,
 More rich in gifts than any of the rest,
 Appeared, in glory, ready to obey
 The wishes of his lord with lively zest.
 Then all the powers stood before the throne
 As quick as light leaps through the ether's space,
 And to the eyes of men Olympus shone
 A piercing splendor that they could not face.
 Apollo's lyre the waiting quiet broke
 And left its echoes wandering through the spheres,
 And Zeus in rhythmic voice majestic spoke
 As only speaker can who has no peers.

“Ye Forces that attend Contriving Will
 Since Will designed and out of chaos drew
 This firmament with all its life, sustained
 By Self-Existent Life, and with it you
 Whose pliant service most adorns its frame
 By working silently throughout the spheres
 That harmony of purpose which reveals
 His presence, active in the smallest things,
 And His one thought of good, ye know that all
 Are free whose service bears the highest worth,
 And what constraint of sweet persuasion lures,
 By my command, from evil ways to good,
 Those hapless ones who sadly choose the wrong.
 And how their wayward folly grows rank grief.
 Your sorrow shall with pity blend to hear
 What fair Mnemosyne will now rehearse.”

Again Apollo's lyre soft echoes woke
 Responsive to its Maker's native stroke.

They chased themselves in phantom melody
 Along the crests of Pindus to the sea,
 And when they sank to silence in the west
 The goddess answered the divine behest.

“O, God, thy pure beneficence
 Enslaves our being to its sense,
 While man of all thy care the end
 Cannot its beauty comprehend.
 No seraph’s thought can ever fly,
 No subtile alchemy can pry
 To realms thy goodness does not know,
 If not to bless, to soften woe.
 This noble race of Hellenese
 Have rarely failed thy hope to please,
 Their greater deeds, thy richer grace,
 Thy poorer gifts, the new displace,
 Until in all that man achieves
 They wore the crown of laurel leaves.
 Then, not from any garnered store
 Of gifts thy hand selected more,
 But from thy wise and loving thought
 A new incentive Force was wrought,
 As if that hand was pleased to see
 How blest its workmanship could be,
 An Energy that hearts incline
 As kindred particles combine,
 To soothe wherever sorrow mars
 And lead the way beyond the stars.
 Hymettus had no sweeter bees
 Than thy last gift to Hellenese
 The poet Orpheus, first and best,
 Immortal myth of all the rest

He sang to shepherds ’neath the dome
 Whose spangles veil the Maker’s home.
 His minstrelsy gave rare delight
 Where rustic swains pursued the right.

He taught the poor those deathless strains
The angels link in their refrains.
He gave the wise such rhapsodies
As filled the land with melodies,
And when their minds could hold no more
Invented letters for the score.
Where'er in temple, wood, or fane
The voice of men God's heart would gain
His sacred hymns like incense rise
In clouds of concord to the skies.
When'er a child was taught to pray
It lisped the cadence of his lay.
Where spoken words dare not intrude
Upon the heart's deep solitude
His lines its message bore on high
As sparks to their own fountain fly.
While thus he sang from place to place
His art acquired a matchless grace,
And as he trod his lonely way
Strange mysteries around him play
To sanctify his steps and guess
What truths his numbers might not dress.
From each low hamlet's simple crowd
His comic verse drew laughter loud,
Or tears pronounced their sympathies
For victims of life's tragedies.
Where any village heard his song
It drew the neighbors to its throng
And thus those Festivals arose
With whose renown no age will close,
Where Gods were patrons of the games
That listed theirs with human names
Since at Olympia's pure shrine
Their fame was joined by thee with thine.
The husbandmen his spirit caught
Until their fields told heaven's own thought.
Their orchards were an epic ode
Each fruitful tree an episode.

Domestic beasts by kindness swayed
 In sleek contentment fondly strayed,
 Or patiently endured the yoke
 With knowing eyes that fairly spoke.
 The sickle sang a sweet refrain
 Where cultured soil enriched the grain,
 And rocks along the inland shores
 Resounded strokes in search for ores.
 The clanging axe among the trees
 Bespoke stout timber for the seas.
 This enterprise such commerce bred
 That all the nation's life was fed.
 The daring Argo led by him
 Beyond horizon's distant brim
 For many wrongs obtained surcease.
 And proudly gained the Golden Fleece.
 Of all those Argonauts achieved
 No feat thy brother Pluto grieved
 More than the witching song he sung
 That hushed the Siren's wicked tongue.

And yet with honors such as these
 Returning to the Hellenese
 He who was leader of his time
 In thoughts that through the ages climb
 Came, strangely, by neglected ways,
 Denied his proper poet's bays,
 To dwell in Melancholy's cave
 In life, or death, his only grave.

While Dionysian rites were pure
 His hymns were their investiture
 Until licentious orgies came
 To render scandalous their name
 And culture priestesses to hate
 The innocence they violate.
 These phrensied women heard the knel
 The poet sang them from his cell.
 With horrid oaths and fiendish spite
 They took him from his cave at night

To rend his body with their teeth
 And strew its fragments o'er the heath.
 The moaning waves of Hebrus bore
 His sacred head to ocean's shore.
 Serene Poseidon paused to weep
 When it came singing on the deep.
 His curse the sea perpetuates,
 The head, he left at Lesbos, waits."

Apollo's lyre hung mute beneath his eye,
 Except its whisper of the common sigh
 Of grief that wafted through the heedful spheres,
 As silence merged that precious voice in tears.

"Thanks! dear Mnemosyne, for this sad due
 That wrings thy heart to tell. We may not spare
 Thy needful record though it give us pain "

Thus Zeus fulfilled his godlike courtesy
 And then addressed his holy company.

"My soul for Hellas weeps as your hearts ache.
 The good the Gods provide for men is spurned.
 The majesty and mystery of love
 In infinite display is rudely mocked
 By reason fitly formed the ornament
 And chief design of all wherein we serve.
 Such evils live but for a day. We wait
 Upon Eternal Life. Haste then ye Gods
 To fetch the mangled shreds of that poor clay
 Where dwelt our poet's spirit now let free
 To immortality, and on this high
 And holy mountain where Apollo's eye
 Forever rests, attend his sepulture
 With such a ritual of obsequies
 As time shall ne'er forget. My daughters nine
 Obey this trust, whom Hermes will attend,
 Apollo guard, while each of you consents."

Lo! in Apollo's hand at once appeared
The lyre he gave to Orpheus, now endeared
By faculties enlarged on other strings.
One sweeping stroke and all sweet sounds took wings
To blend in measures to awake the dead
From musty cerements, or collect each shred
Long lost, and like the rapture of a vision
Transport their spirit forms to fields elysian
Ere his resurgent strains had died away
The form of Orpheus on Olympus lay,
And that celestial choir about its bier
Intoned such chorals of triumphant cheer
As thrilled beyond Cecilia's utmost bars
And hushed the music of the morning stars.

Now dextrous Hermes, winged at feet and head,
To noble courtesy divinely bred,
Each Muse presented near the shrouded bier
To sing her requiem forever dear
To their fond mother sweet Mnemosyne.
The silver toned was first, Calliope.

“ I sing the holy common heart
The soul and end of real art.
The poet tunes its finest strings
To joy perennial when he sings,
Or heals its sorrow laden sigh
With comfort villains cannot try.
When human thought is in its youth
He learns from it the crystal truth
And sets it in a form so rare
No age its lustre can impair.
When knowledge tangled in a maze
Conceals the truth from reason's gaze
He sees by its prophetic lore
The beacon on the other shore.

He gives his life in humble tears
 To share its hopes, possess its fears.
 Nor gold, nor crowns its passion prove
 It gives itself, immortal love."

A plaintive miserere's tender staves
 With all Athene's flutes in flowing waves
 Expressed the longing in each heaven born breast
 To share a brotherhood by all confessed.
 A holy quiet fell upon the throng
 Until brisk Hermes ushered Clío's song.

"This world is but by glimpses seen
 Without a blending light between.
 Each hero tells his narrative
 With all the color he can give
 Each day reveals some newer thought
 To set the former time at naught.
 Each faction strives to gain the rule
 And use the other for its tool.
 And yet there is an eye that sees
 One growing plan in all of these.
 The lives of men must ever be
 Like drops of water in the sea,
 Now in the depths, now dashed on high,
 Now vapor floating to the sky,
 Yet each has its own destiny
 Its duty and its agony.
 Beneath the restless sea of time
 There runs a golden cord sublime
 That gets a life from cloud veiled skies
 To tell the world where freedom lies.
 Its whispers charm the poet's ears
 He sings the harmony he hears."

Now Ares marshaled the celestial host,
 While Hestia bore the banner, heaven's boast,

And grim Hephæstus made the world resound
 With cymbals, bells, and every clanging sound,
 With ringing shouts, and peals of clapping hands,
 With fear, and love, and strife in all the bands.
 Nine turns reversed around the bier they wheeled
 And at its foot in solid phalanx kneeled.

With ever restful faith they turn away
 From Clio's maze to hear Euterpe's lay.

“There is a world within my breast
 Whose seas of passion never rest.
 No plummet sounds their wondrous deep
 No sail encompasses their sweep.
 Rare jewels lie in golden sands
 Celestial breezes fan their strands,
 And voices sound from shore to shore
 That angels wistfully adore.
 When I their charming tales relate
 I feel that other hearts dilate
 And pleasures roll from soul to soul
 In flowing waves without control.
 Earth's beauty takes a fresher hue
 As if the spirit's bliss it knew,
 And brutes are glad to sympathize
 With joy that beams from human eyes.
 The stars seem nearer to the earth
 And kindling souls receive new birth.
 O, when the poet tunes his lyre
 To sing my inmost heart's desire
 His holy numbers bid me rise
 Upon their ardor to the skies.”

Apollo now the tender chorus swayed
 To strains that doubtfully their thought conveyed,
 With echoes like the twinkling of a star
 That faints when forced to send its light too far.
 From Helicon and all the mountains round
 Those echoes trembled heavenward from the ground

To fall as gently as the vesper dew
 Or sighs of love-sick Merope that drew
 Reluctant leave from sister Pleiades
 To wed a mortal from the Hellenese
 And with an art endow him that could wring
 From Moros all the wormwood of his sting.

With mincing gait and smirking clownish face
 Thalia strutted to the singer's place.

“ I would not wound the humblest soul
 That labors after virtue's goal,
 Nor choose to make the vicious fool
 The target of my ridicule.
 But when the priests have lost their power
 And at the shrine of Mammon cower,
 And law is but a cheating game
 To mock a stable social frame,
 And none appear who dare defend
 The truths that selfishness offend
 'Tis then the Gods ordain to purge
 The social fabric with my scourge.
 Clear as the sun the poet stays
 The gracious beacon of his days,
 To vice a foe, to virtue true
 Though shame and poverty ensue.
 The wise shall write his epitaph
 He ruled the foolish with a laugh.”

Sly Momus asked for Psyche leave to try
 If with such heavenly measures she could vie.
 In robes of motley sheen, as proud as vain
 To be admitted to that noble train,
 She first her posture fixed, and then her dress,
 Then cleared her voice, and smiled her happiness,
 And hemmed again, and heaved her snowy breast,
 And with conceited effort sang her best.

There was amid the rites a ghastly pause
 While she was waiting for divine applause
 To hear from Hippocrene's fount the neigh
 Of Pegasus who did his best to bray.
 Poor Psyche swooned upon the tender breast
 Of Niobe by Zeus and all caressed.

So near was this to comic tragedy
 That Hermes ushered next Melpomene.

“ Horror, horror, everywhere,
 Sorrow, death and dire despair
 Hurling through the earth and air,
 Ruin stalking from her lair.
 Man with power to choose the light
 Dwelling in the dismal night,
 Souls designed to love the right
 Holding error with delight.
 Hearts beneath the evil smother,
 Children wailing for their mother,
 God descends to help another,
 Cain for gold destroys his brother.
 Poet of humanity
 Sing the power of Charity,
 Tell the tearful tragedy
 All its blessed remedy.”

The charms of Aphrodite waned before
 The graceful attitude Pandora bore,
 Endowed with all the gifts the Gods could give,
 When she discharged her grave prerogative.
 Her crown, such work Hephæstus only weaves,
 Was golden filigree of apple leaves,
 And o'er her heart a beaming cross more rare
 Than any other soul in heaven could wear.
 She stood a moment like a glowing star
 Then opened wide her alabaster jar
 And let a cloud of incense spread on high
 With blue and purple folds to drape the sky.

Portrayed upon this screen was Caucasus
 A lofty peak most bleakly mountainous.
 And on its side Prometheus chained in agony
 Submitted to an eagle's gluttony
 That tore his bleeding flesh while still it grew
 To tortures his invention never knew.

She closed the jar and all the air was clear
 Then opened it again with trembling fear.
 Such dark and lurid banks of cloud arose
 As open gates of Tartarus disclose.
 Upon their front in traceries of light
 A dim and startling picture met the sight.
 A cross that bore a form of godlike mien
 Amid a crowd of hooting men was seen
 And through the dark a flame came streaming down
 To sit in glory on its thorny crown.

Amazed to understand this mystic show
 They asked to hear the song of Erato.

“The love* that binds the human race
 To keep the social frame in place
 Is but a worthless sentiment
 If it is not to justice bent.
 The qualities of mercy fail
 Where justice is of no avail.
 The want of all veracity
 Is Pluto's wished calamity.
 True rectitude must ever be
 The poet's love Eurydice.
 Ixion's wheel revolves no more,
 The wounds of Tityus heal o'er,
 And Tantalus forgets to drink
 To see him walking on their brink
 In search of her whom demons stole
 And bore away to that dark hole.
 Forsaking all except his lyre
 He boldly fronts those demons sire.

O, Earth, resound thy jubilee
 He gains his love Eurydice.
 Alas! the faith of mortal men
 He backward looks, she sinks again."

Then Sysiphus in misery was shown
 With patience heaving his retreating stone
 While charming music in suggestive measures
 In dying roused the hope of sweeter pleasures.
 They cheered the dauntless hero's bravery
 When called to hear the gay Terpsichore.

"There's not a thing however lone
 But has dear kindred of its own
 And man must ever realize
 His highest joy in social ties.
 The pious bigot loves himself,
 The sordid miser hugs his self,
 While christian men enjoy good cheer
 And hold each other ever dear.
 Then let the merry feet go round
 To music's most inviting sound
 And hearts leap up in glad surprise
 To meet the love from flashing eyes.
 Let feasting happy hours prolong
 Until they swell with jolly song
 And when the dawn appears in sight
 Let farewell kisses bury spite.
 O, happy he whose heart contains
 The glowing fire to weld the chains
 To fetter each enamored soul
 And bind it in the social whole."

Two companies they formed and joined the dance
 To measured music's tripping resonance
 And to the tune a gleeful carol sung
 That with their movements rhythmically swung.

In rolling waves with surging ebb and flow,
 And pirouetting singly to and fro,
 With agile limbs and lissome form they caught
 The poetry of motion in their thought.
 Or gliding softly as a summer breeze
 Through modest gestures with voluptuous ease
 They led their ardent spirits to aspire
 To reach the summit of their pure desire.
 With hand in hand through many an airy round
 They chased the charming music's floating sound
 And trod their measures like a flooding river
 Until they felt, beneath, Olympus quiver.

To such diversion Hermes gave the choice
 To be the prelude to Polymnia's voice.

“Thy praise O God is waiting thee
 Wherever work of thine may be
 However vast this solar frame
 Its smallest part extols thy name.
 Through all the years of time there swells
 The anthem that thy glory tells,
 Sweet sound to sweeter sound replies
 Its growing measures fill the skies.
 Beyond the realms that men explore
 It vies with all that thee adore
 And throngs of matchless angels sing
 Resounding praises to the King.
 O, could my heart this hymn indite
 And all its glowing rhythm recite
 No seraph's voice would higher raise
 The pean of thy holy praise.”

Apollo caught the wheel upon his lyre,
 The flushing ardor of the choir took fire
 And such a choral hallelujah gave
 As shook the highest heaven's architrave.

Enraptured to the topmost of their bent
 They crowded round the bier with thoughts intent
 Upon the mystery of things supreme
 That lurked beneath Urania's lofty theme.

“Hail! Death thou phantom of a dream,
 Thou art not what thy features seem,
 I scorn thy horror crested pride,
 The Grave, thy sorrow reeking bride.
 My soul is free, I will not hear
 The stupid mumble of a fear.
 The slave to sin and woe no more
 I will this universe explore.

In humble tones beneath my feet
 And from the farthest world's retreat
 Its countless voices join to say
 The life of man has no decay.
 And when to reason I appeal
 To know what it may well reveal
 The formal courses of the mind
 With ease the same conclusion find.
 But my dear heart more certain still
 Because it touches heaven's will
 Can never doubt its quality
 But feels its immortality.
 Then how sublime the confirmation
 That God bestows by revelation,
 His voice has crowned the certainty,
 I know my immortality.

The poet stands on ocean's shore
 To listen to its mystic lore,
 The sands beneath his feet are white.
 Unending dawn contents his sight.”

Almighty Zeus then laid his sceptre by
 And threw the lyre of Orpheus to the sky.
 Its constellation roves the stellar way
 And willing minds adore its quickening sway.

Before its light could cross the ether's space
The Olympian court became an empty place.

The tomb made holy by such rites as these
Was soon dishonored by the Hellenese
And Zeus to mark the stress of his disdain
Made Ossa and Olympus burst in twain
To let the Vale of Tempe lie between
The loveliest spot of earth that eye has seen
Where nature all her beauty still unveils
To greet these warbles of the nightingales:

“ Brave, guileless souls, rejected by their own
To rise through mystic sorrow to their throne,
Who drink the gall, yet sweetly furnish bread
To feed the hungry long, when they are dead,
Who faithful sow the truth in fallow fields
And wait in peace the harvest that it yields,
Mysterious beings, coming unawares
To every age its rightful honored heirs,
Unselfish as the self-consuming sun
That spreads new life where'er its courses run
The Spirits that inspire their quickening lays
Will cull their fruit with joy through endless days.”



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